

## **TESTIMONY**

### **Transportation Comm. Public Hearing**

**Monday February 4, 2013**

**JIM CAMERON / Chairman**

**CT Metro-North Rail Commuter Council**



My name is Jim Cameron. I reside in Darien where I have been a commuter for 22 years. But I am here today as Chairman of the CT Metro-North Rail Commuter Council. I would like to speak to a number of bills before you today. While our Council has not examined the specific proposals you are considering, we have a consensus on most of the issues they address.

### **STATION PARKING: SB 696 HB 5130**

There is no greater problem for rail commuters than finding sufficient parking at stations. In my town of Darien there is an 8-year waiting list for annual parking permits. Yet, the CDOT has no plans to do anything to expand parking and provide greater access to our trains in southwestern Connecticut.

The CDOT's parking leases with the towns of Darien, Westport and Greenwich have expired, leaving the towns wondering what the state's plans are for the parking they administer.

In Stamford, CDOT is the middle of a secretive public/private negotiation to demolish the 700-space parking garage adjacent to the station, move it up to a quarter mile away, and use the state-owned land to build an office or condo complex. There has been zero public input in this plan and nothing has been done to solicit commuter input.

CDOT needs to be told: inventory the parking problems, fix them, and include all the stakeholders. State-owned land near rail stations should be used for commuters, not private developers.

**SPECIAL TRANSPORTATION FUND:     HB 5320   HB 6039   HB 6164**

Nobody likes fare increases on Metro-North. But commuters were shocked last year during the budget cycle to find that a proposed 15% fare hike wasn't going to be spent to improve rail service, but to fill the deficit hole in the budget. That's not a fare increase, it's a tax.

Connecticut riders on Metro-North pay the highest rail fares in the United States. For the most part, they get value for their money. But the Special Transportation Fund must be locked down and not used as a slush fund for the OPM. Lock it down!

**BRANCH LINE SERVICE:     HB 6035     HB 5180**

Connecticut has two classes of commuter railroads: the first class mainline (from the NY state line to New Haven), and the second class branch lines (to Danbury, Waterbury and New London). While the mainline trains use modern equipment providing frequent, reliable service, the branch lines are run with older diesel engines prone to frequent breakdowns and service gaps of many hours.

Riders of our branch lines are not second class citizens. They deserve the same quality rail service as commuters on the mainline. Invest in the branch lines.

**EXPANDING USE OF MASS TRANSIT:     SB 183     SB 226     SB 636**

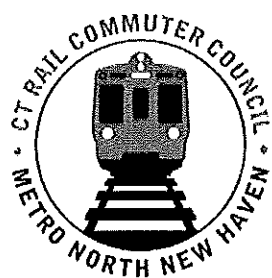
The best way to maximize a return on the state's investments in mass transit is to 1) make the system accessible with sufficient parking at stations, 2) increase the frequency of service using newly added equipment and 3) keep fares affordable with state subsidies.

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***The Connecticut Metro-North Rail Commuter Council***

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## 2012 Annual Report

# CT METRO-NORTH COMMUTER RAIL COUNCIL

## News and Highlights of the Council's Advocacy for Rail Commuters in 2012

### Stamford Garage

As CDOT moved forward with plans to demolish the older portion of the parking garage adjacent to the Stamford train station (727 spaces), the Council pushed for reconstruction and expansion of parking at the current, convenient location. CDOT refused, and sought proposals from private developers for a replacement garage up to 1/4 mile from the station. The developers' proposals remained secret, so the Council pushed for public hearings, persuading Governor Malloy to appoint a task force of private citizens (including a member of the Commuter Council) to work with CDOT as it reviews the proposals. A final decision is due in February.

### Communications

The need for improved customer communications, especially during service disruptions, has been an ongoing concern of the Council, and 2012 saw substantial progress from Metro-North both in timeliness and content of information. Riders can now choose among many alternatives including website, e-mail, texting and social media in addition to on-board and station PA announcements.

### Fare Increases

By legislative action, three annual 5+% fare increases were scheduled for 2012, 2013 and 2014, in part to help pay for the new M8 cars. But when proceeds of the 2012 fare hike were designated for non-railroad spending, the Council protested, characterizing the fare increase as a form of tax on commuters. The Council feels fare hikes should be spent on the railroad.

### Ticket Refunds

Thanks to efforts by the Council, Metro-North reversed a 2010 decision to reduce the validity period for tickets. Single trip tickets are now valid for 60 days (up from 14 days), but ten-trip tickets still remain valid for only six months instead of the previous policy of one year.

### Quiet Cars

For more than five years the Council has been asking Metro-North to designate one car per train as a cellphone-free "Quiet Car". In 2012 the railroad finally agreed and now each rush-hour train has such a car, offering a "Quiet CALMmute" for those who'd like it.

### New M8 Rail Cars

Delivery of the new M8 rail cars continues with 174 of the 400 cars on order now delivered. The cars are performing well with only minor complaints from riders.

### OUR MANDATE

To be the eyes, ears and voice of our fellow commuters on Metro-North and Shore Line East railroads. We are your advocates for ever improving rail service. Appointed by the Governor and legislative leaders, our members are commuters like you. We serve four-year terms without compensation. We meet monthly with officials from Metro-North and the CT Dept of Transportation to address complaints, raise suggestions and share rider feedback. We operate on a budget of zero tax dollars.

### MEMBERS

Jim Cameron, *Chair* (Darien)  
Terri Cronin, *Vice Chair* (Norwalk)  
Rodney Chabot, *Past Chair* (New Canaan)  
Tim Beeble, *Secretary* (Bethel)  
Roger Cirella (Ansonia)  
Laura Cordes (New London)  
John Davis\* (Stamford)  
Mitchell Fuchs (Fairfield)  
Jim Gildea\* (Derby)  
John Hartwell (Westport)  
Dave Hendricks\* (Stamford)  
Bob Jelley (Guilford)  
Jeffrey Maron (Stamford)  
Sue Prosi (Stratford)  
Luke Schnirring (Norwalk)

*\*new member in 2012*

### CONTACT US

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**Twitter:** @CTRailCommuters

#### Facebook:

[www.facebook.com/groups/CTRailCommuters](http://www.facebook.com/groups/CTRailCommuters)

### JOIN OUR EMAIL ALERT LIST

To learn more about the Council's work, visit our website or join our Email Alert list. Send your name, email and home station to:  
[CTRailCommuterCouncil@gmail.com](mailto:CTRailCommuterCouncil@gmail.com)

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## **2012 Annual Report: CT METRO-NORTH COMMUTER RAIL COUNCIL**

### **Highlights of the Council's Advocacy for Rail Commuters in 2012**

*(continued from page 1)*

#### **East Side Access**

The Council toured the massive \$7+ billion East Side Access construction site under Grand Central Terminal where some Long Island RR trains will arrive starting in 2019. The Council continues to express its concerns to Metro-North about the impact of tens of thousands of new daily riders on the already crowded terminal and adjacent Lexington Avenue subway line. The Council also urges MTA to make accommodation for Metro-North trains to service Penn Station as an offset.

#### **Expanded Service**

Responding to a request from the Council, hourly off-peak service is now available at Southport, Greens Farms, East Norwalk and Rowayton stations, which previously had service every two hours. Weekend service was also expanded on the entire line.

#### **Passenger Pledge**

Following the breakdown of a train near Westport in July 2011, the Council worked closely with Fairfield County legislators to draft a "Passenger Bill of Rights". Metro-North modified the document and rolled out a system-wide "Passenger Pledge", for the first time delineating the kind of service that passengers deserve. The Pledge is now posted at every station and in most rail cars.

#### **Customer Satisfaction Survey**

Many years ago the Council created the first-ever survey of rider satisfaction. Now jointly administered by the Council and Metro-North, the survey gives the railroad important feedback on areas of needed improvement. The 2012 survey reflected increased satisfaction over 2011 results thanks to new cars and better service.

### **Ongoing Issues of Concern for the Council in 2013**

#### **Station Parking**

Most stations in southwest Connecticut have waiting lists for annual parking permits of 5 to 8 years. More must be done to expand parking and access to the trains.

#### **Ticket Collections**

The Council handles dozens of complaints from riders who see other riders' tickets go uncollected on the trains.

#### **Ticket Refunds**

When service is cancelled due to bad weather, commuters should be given refunds on tickets they purchased but could not use.

#### **Crowding on Trains**

Despite having more cars in its fleet, increased ridership has again led to serious crowding problems on many trains. More cars should be added to trains to assure that every passenger gets a seat.

#### **Expanded Service**

With an expanded fleet of rail cars, The Council encourages Metro-North to add more trains more often, especially on the under-served Danbury and Waterbury branch lines.